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October 19, 2016

TO: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Sheila Kuehl
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: John Naimo 
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT –
JANUARY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30, 2016**

This memorandum is to provide you with information about the Auditor-Controller's Children's Group Home Ombudsman (Ombudsman) Program for the period of January 1 through June 30, 2016.

Background

The Ombudsman serves as an advocate for children placed in group homes (GH) by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and provides a confidential and informal process to resolve issues raised by children residing in GHs. The Ombudsman responds to requests for assistance (requests), which are generally received through a toll-free hotline, e-mail, and during periodic site visits. The Ombudsman hotline number and e-mail address are included on posters which are required to be displayed in every County-contracted GH. In addition, Ombudsman staff conduct routine site visits encouraging children to call the hotline if they need assistance in resolving GH problems.

Upon receiving a request, the Ombudsman interviews the requester to understand the situation and to determine an appropriate response and/or course of action. The Ombudsman may also contact other parties, including DCFS personnel, GH providers, or others as needed to gather additional information, and also to facilitate a reasonable solution that is within the children's rights and established regulations.

Summary of Requests for Assistance

During this six-month reporting period, we received a total of 139 requests, consisting of 94 hotline calls and 45 direct requests during site visits. For comparison, the Ombudsman hotline received 120 requests and 139 requests in each of the prior two six-month reporting periods, respectively. Attachment I details the types of requests received by the Ombudsman. Overall, 116 (83%) of the 139 requests (4 Safety, 30 Personal Rights, and 82 "Other") were resolved within the Ombudsman's purview. Attachment II identifies the GHs involved with the 116 requests. The remaining 23 requests involved individuals seeking general information (18 requests pertaining to GHs and 5 requests that were non-GH related). In such cases, the Ombudsman provided an answer or directed the requester to the appropriate party.

Assistance requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller. Requests indicating safety issues, such as a possible threat to the physical safety or well-being of the youth, are prioritized and immediately referred to the Child Protection Hotline (CPH), the Department of Mental Health's (DMH) 24-Hour Access Hotline, local law enforcement, or another appropriate party for investigation, depending on the nature of the allegation(s). The Ombudsman's goal is to be accessible and to assist all callers, and accordingly, all requests for assistance are presumed to be factual until proven otherwise through follow-up.

During this reporting period, there were four calls relating to safety. We immediately referred three of them to the CPH because they indicated a possible threat to the physical safety or well-being of placed children. The table below summarizes the issues we reported and CPH's conclusion.

Allegation	CPH Conclusion
A staff member grabbed a youth by his shirt.	Inconclusive
A staff member grabbed a youth by his arm and pushed him.	Unfounded
A staff member slapped a youth while at her prior placement.	Unfounded

We referred a fourth concern to the GH Administrator because the youth felt unsafe around the other residents due to fights between other facility residents. The GH Administrator contacted local law enforcement, and adjusted the group activity schedule to minimize negative interactions.

To ensure that requests were properly addressed and resolved, we completed various communications and referrals to the DCFS Ombudsman, Children's Social Workers

(CSW), CPH, Out-of-Home Care Management Division, Contract Administration Division, and the Public Inquiry Unit. In addition, the Ombudsman frequently communicated and coordinated with the Probation Department (Probation) Ombudsman, Probation GH Monitoring and Investigations Unit, State Community Care Licensing, GH staff/management, and occasionally other counties to ensure the requester's issues were fully addressed and that proper agencies were notified. The requests identified in this report concerning physical harm/safety were referred to and followed-up on by DCFS.

We noted that three agencies accounted for 38 (33%) of the 116 requests. We received a majority of these requests during outreach visits we conducted jointly with the Probation Ombudsman. The volume of requests at these agencies is not necessarily an indication of a problem, and these agencies have a relatively large number of placed children. In addition, some of the requests were from the same youth calling at different times with different requests. The requests were resolved through follow-up with CSWs, Probation Officers, and the GH as needed. We will continue to conduct regularly scheduled outreach to youth placed in these and other GHs with higher volumes of requests, to ensure that the concerns of placed children are addressed.

The following are examples of requests received and resolved within the purview of the Ombudsman during this reporting period:

- A youth called and stated that he was not allowed to go to football practice, and if he did not attend practice, he would not be allowed to play in the upcoming game. However, the youth acknowledged that he was not following the rules (i.e., completing his chores or doing his homework). The Ombudsman spoke with the GH about allowing the youth to attend football practice with the agreement he would come home right after practice and complete his chores and homework. Although playing football was a privilege, taking away this positive and structured activity would have a negative impact on the youth. The GH agreed and allowed him to go to practice. The Ombudsman spoke with the youth who was appreciative of the advocacy and agreed to complete his obligations after football practice. The Ombudsman also spoke with the youth's CSW who was aware the youth was having behavioral issues, and a team meeting was scheduled to discuss them.
- A youth called and reported that she had not received some of her allowance from her prior GH placement and did not know what to do. The Ombudsman contacted her prior placement and after researching, the prior placement determined that they owed the youth money and would issue a check. The Ombudsman coordinated with the youth's Supervising CSW and prior GH placement to ensure the check would be mailed to the youth's current GH address. The Ombudsman followed-up with the youth and confirmed she received a check for \$158.

Outreach

One of the Ombudsman's responsibilities is to visit GHs, and provide DCFS children and GH staff with information about the Ombudsman function. Before each site visit, recent audit, monitoring, and quality assurance reports about the GH are reviewed, and visits are prioritized and scheduled based on concerns reported by residents, information from recent reports, and/or concerns raised by the Sybil Brand Commission, Commission for Children and Families, and DCFS Special Audit Committee. In addition, requests received from GH residents may trigger additional announced and/or unannounced visits.

During this reporting period, the Ombudsman conducted outreach to 65 GH sites (operated by 32 agencies). Nine GH site visits were conducted with the Probation Ombudsman because some GHs have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. The joint outreach visits increase awareness and clarity about the resources available to GH residents. In addition, ten non-contracted GH sites were included in our visits, which DCFS management explained are used for hard-to-place youth or when other placement options have been exhausted.

In total, including non-contracted GHs and visits with the Probation Ombudsman, we met with 310 children, gave verbal presentations, and provided them with brochures. During these visits, GH residents also had the opportunity to ask questions and request assistance if needed. Attachment III identifies the GH site visits completed during this reporting period.

Conclusion

We will continue to conduct visits to contracted and non-contracted GHs during the next reporting period, and coordinate with the Probation Ombudsman where GHs have both DCFS and Probation-placed youth. We will also continue to ensure that lines of communication remain open with youth residing in GHs so they receive assistance when needed.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me or your staff may contact Michelle Day, Children's Group Home Ombudsman, at (213) 253-0117 or via e-mail at mday@auditor.lacounty.gov.

JN:AB:PH:RGC:GH:md

Attachments

c: Sachi A. Hamai, Chief Executive Officer
Philip L. Browning, Director, DCFS
Honorable Michael Nash, Executive Director, Office of Child Protection

Calvin C. Remington, Interim Chief Probation Officer
Audit Committee
Children's Deputies
Commission for Children and Families
Contracts Administration Division, DCFS
Out-of-Home Care Management Division, DCFS
Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance, Probation
Jessica Gama, Probation Ombudsman
Public Information Office
Sybil Brand Commission

LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*

BY TYPE

January 1 through June 30, 2016

1. Safety	4
Physical Harm	2
Physical Safety	2
2. Personal Rights	30
Respect	7
Food	5
Health/Medical, Dental Care	5
Clothing	4
School	4
Family/Social Contacts	3
Allowance	1
Living Conditions	1
3. "Other"	82
Children's Social Worker and/or Attorney Contact	14
Activities/Outings	7
CSW Concerns	7
Placement Concerns	7
Unfair Consequences/Restrictions/Treatment	7
Family Visits	5
Independent Living Program/Transitional Housing	5
Home/Community Passes	4
Peer Issues	4
Personal Belongings/Property	3
Case/County Transfer/File Review	2
Room Searches	2
Cottage Movement	1
Court Date	1
Curfew	1
Group Therapy	1
Identification Documents	1
Inappropriate Contact (at prior placement)	1
Lack of Supervision	1
Parenting Classes	1
Personal Hygiene	1
Possession of Cell Phone	1
Restraining Techniques	1
Safeguarding Money	1
Staff Concerns	1
Supervision of Own Child	1
Use of Group Home Wi-Fi	1
4. All Types Above - Total	116
5. General Information	23
GH Related	18
Non-GH Related	5
6. Total Requests Received by Ombudsman	139

*Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE RECEIVED*
BY GROUP HOME**

January 1 through June 30, 2016

Group Home Agency	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Supervisorial District(s) / County	Number of Requests	Types of Requests
St. Anne's Maternity Home	32	1	1	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Concerns (4) •CSW Contact (3) •Home/Community Passes (3) •Family Visits •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Independent Living Program •Unfair Consequences
Rosemary Children's Services	39	5	5	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Health/Medical, Dental Care (3) •Social Contacts (2) •Placement Concerns (2) •Activities •CSW Concern •Family Visits •Peer Issues •Physical Harm (in prior placement) •Respect •Family Visits (3) •CSW Contact (2) •Attorney Contact •Food •Parenting Classes •Peer Issues •Respect •School
Maryvale	72	1	1	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact (4) •Living Conditions •Placement Concern •Possession of Cell Phone •Social Contact •Transitional Housing •Room Searches (2) •Unfair Restriction (2) •Cottage Movement •Group Therapy •Lack of Supervision •Physical Safety •Treatment by Staff
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services	50	1	5	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact (3) •Respect (2) •Allowance •CSW Concerns •Independent Living Program •Placement Concerns (2)
Crittenton Services for Children and Families	91 (54 beds for girls and 37 for children up to age 4)	1	Orange County	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clothing •Court Date •Health/Medical, Dental Care •Activities •Food •Independent Living Program •Unfair Treatment
Heritage Group Home, Inc.	30	5	1, 4, 5	8	
Fleming and Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care Facilities	24	4	2, 4, 5	5	
Children's Homes of Southern California	30	5	3	4	

Group Home Agency	Total Number of Beds	Number of Sites	Supervisorial District(s) / County	Number of Requests	Types of Requests
Five Acres	56	2	5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Physical Harm •Restraining Technique •School •Unfair Restriction
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home	12	2	5	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Activities (2) •Clothing •School
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services	24	1	2	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clothing •Personal Hygiene •Peer Issues
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network	18	3	3, 5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Clothing •Home/Community Passes •School
Dream Home Care, Inc.	18	3	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Activities •Case File Review •Physical Safety
B & I Group Home	12	2	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Personal Property •Use of Group Home Wi-Fi
Homes of Hope/Casa Esperanza Treatment Center	6	1	1	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Peer Issues •Respect
Orange County Children's Foundation	18	3	2, 4, Orange County	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Food •Personal Property
Project Six / The Help Group	32	1	3	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Food •Personal Belongings
Penny Lane Centers	105	11	3, 5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Case/County Transfer •CSW Concern
Bourne, Inc.	12	2	5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Food •Outings
Luvlee's Residential Care/New Dawn	12	2	San Bernardino County	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identification Documents •Unfair Consequences
Careprovider Children & Family Services	12	2	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Staff Concerns
Dangerfield Group Home	18	3	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Placement Concern
Delilu Achievement Home	8	1	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Inappropriate Contact
Dream Catcher Foundation	18	3	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Safeguarding Money
Sand Hill Group Home, Inc.	6	1	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Respect
T & T Home for Boys	6	1	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Independent Living Program
South Bay Bright Future	18	3	2, 4	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •CSW Contact
Los Angeles Youth Network	12	1	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Curfew
Leroy Haynes Center for Children and Family Services	72	1	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Respect
Macro Homes	6	1	5	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Placement Concern
Mary's Shelter Independent Program	18	2	Orange County	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Supervision of Own Child
Field's Comprehensive Youth Services	12	2	San Bernardino County	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Activities
TOTAL				116	

*Requests are categorized based on the initial allegation as described by the youth/caller.

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILDREN'S GROUP HOME OMBUDSMAN
GROUP HOME SITES VISITED FOR OUTREACH**

January 1 through June 30, 2016

Group Home Agency	NC	JO	Supervisory District(s) / County	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location(s)
Anka Behavioral Health, Inc.	X		1	2	• Pomona • Montebello
Alpha Connection	X		San Bernardino County	1	• Apple Valley
B & I Group Home			1	2	• Pomona (2)
Bourne, Inc.			5	1	• Altadena
Candlelight Homes	X		1	1	• West Covina
Children's Home of Southern California			3	5	• Reseda • Van Nuys (2) • West Hills (2)
Crittenton Services for Children and Families		X	Orange County	1	• Fullerton
Dangerfield Group Home			2	3	• Los Angeles (3)
David and Margaret Youth and Family Services		X	5	1	• La Verne
Dream Home Care, Inc.			4	3	• Long Beach
Five Acres			5	2	• Altadena • Pasadena
Fleming and Barnes, Inc. dba Dimondale Adolescent Care Facilities			2, 5	2	• Carson • Lancaster
For The Future	X		Ventura County	1	• Simi Valley
Fred Jefferson Memorial Home			2	2	• Compton (2)
Heritage Group Home, Inc.			1, 4, 5	5	• La Verne • Phillips Ranch • Valinda • West Covina • Whittier
Homes of Hope/Casa Esperanza Treatment Center			1	1	• Pomona
Hope House	X		1	2	• El Monte (2)
Human Services Network dba Youth Services Network			3, 5	3	• Granada Hills • North Hills • Shadow Hills
Los Angeles Youth Network			3	1	• Los Angeles
Luvlee's Residential Care/New Dawn Emancipation			1, San Bernardino County	2	• Chino • Walnut
Maryvale (2 visits)		X	1	1	• Rosemead
Murrell's Farm and Boys Home			5	2	• Lancaster (2)
Orange County Children's Foundation			2, 4, Orange County	3	• Carson • Placentia • Torrance
Project Six / The Help Group			3	1	• Van Nuys

Group Home Agency	NC	JO	Supervisorial District(s) / County	Number of Sites	Site Visit Location(s)
Rosemary Children's Services (multiple visits)		X	5	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasadena (4) • South Pasadena
Sand Hill Group Home, Inc.			2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Los Angeles
South Bay Bright Future			2, 4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harbor City • San Pedro (2)
South Coast Children's Society	X		Orange County	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costa Mesa • Fountain Valley (2)
St. Anne's Maternity Home		X	1	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Los Angeles
T & T Home for Boys			2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compton
Turmont Home for Boys/Girls			2, 5	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carson • Lancaster
West Covina Group Home			San Bernardino County	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chino
Total				65	

NC=Non-Contracted Group Home
JO=Joint Outreach Visit with the Probation Ombudsman